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ABSTRACT

The author commends the Ohio Education Association (OEA) for its role in encouraging collective bargaining in the state and for its actions against recalcitrant boards of education that refuse to grant teachers a say in school district decision-making. By levying sanctions and, in some cases, striking against oppressive school boards, the Ohio teachers have made some progress, though the state still does not have a collective bargaining law. The OEA encourages its members to keep well informed on innovations in curriculum through inservice education. Hopefully teachers will eventually be allowed to contribute to school district curriculum planning. (Author/DS)

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Collective Bargaining and Curriculum Reform in Ohio School Districts

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Collective Bargaining and Curriculum Reform in Ohio School Districts

Teachers in Ohio and other states have always had a poor self-image. After all, most teachers felt that working with children should somehow be paid less than other professions. Since teachers depended on school levies in order to get a pay increase, they often felt like poor relations, having to get out and drum up sympathy and support from their betters. Then, after hard work in public relations, maybe the good people of the voting district would grant a much needed raise in pay. Teachers very seldom asserted themselves as part of a united profession. Somehow, a profession should not have to "get tough" in order to obtain further salary increases. Teachers forgot the example of the American Medical Association, perhaps the strongest union of professionals in the United States. Instead of being a proud profession, teaching became a weak, docile amalgamation united in name only. School boards handed down decidions to teachers and teachers obeyed. School boards extended duties and moral regulations and teachers went along. Respect for teachers sunk lower and lower. School boards became arrogant and dictatorial. But, somewhere along the line in the early 1960's, school boards pushed a little too hard and teachers began to stand up and defend themselves. Among the orginizations strengthened in the 1960's was the Ohio Education Association. Because of their new-found strength and unity in Ohio, teachers began to demand a word in salary negotiations and in curriculum reform. Soon, the clash between school boards and local associations was on in earnest and the outcome of this clash is still in doubt.

The attitude of school boards in Ohio is typified by a recent article by Warren F. Thomas in the OSBA Journal (October, 1975). Dr. Thomas castigates teachers who want a collective bargaining agreement in Ohio. He believes that teachers have enough benefits without any further laws being passed.

> It seems to me if equity is desired by public school teachers and their unions, then the procedures for achieving equity and any resulting benefits must be similar. I, therefore, propose that if collective bargaining for public school teachers becomes a legislated mandate, the General Assembly, at the same time, must negate many of the present statutory collateral benefits now enjoyed by teachers. These could then become, if so desired, items for negotiations. If school administrators are not granted collective bargaining rights, and, in my opinion they should not be, they then should retain the statutory benefits rescinded for the teachers. With this proposal equity will be achieved.[1]

If I understand Dr. Thomas correctly, he would have teachers give up any sick leave benefits, seniority rights, due process, guaranteed minimum salary schedules, tenure, safe and sanitary working conditions, and any other benefits now guaranteed by law. After this, he would have teachers renegotiate all of these items with school boards. This would be fair says Dr. Thomas. Such reasoning by this ex-superintendent shows the old administrator arrogance toward the teaching profession. Dr. Thomas is probably more familiar with the old form of collective begging practiced by docile teachers over the years. Teachers of today do not roll over and play dead as much as they used to.

However, administrators are also fighting back against collective bargaining. Articles like Dr. Thomas's appear regularly in school board journals. School boards are not giving an inch at the bargaining table. NEA President John Royer has toured the United States in an attempt to survey the situation. He states that a definite pattern in most small towns where administrators are waging a war against teacher organizations. Boards of education are "trying to destroy teachers and to take from them the last vestige of their own dignity." He goes on to explain that teachers do not want to rule the districts but merely want to help make decisions concerning salary and curriculum.[2] Teaching professionals need to have a large say in these matters, especially when boards of education do not have the professional background in education that teachers have.

In an attempt to gain some control over decisions that influence them, teachers in Ohio often have to resort to strikes or other symbolic attempts, such as the sanction, in order to show boards of education that the years of obeisance are past. Most of these actions have resulted in a gain in teacher respect for themselves at least. School boards and administrators, on the other hand, often try to use public opinion against teachers, hinting that a real professional would never strike against children. David B. Martin, writing in the Ohio School Boards Journal, attacks the teacher strategy of sanctions:

> The question arises...whether sanctions are effective from the employees' point of view or, in fact, if they are harmful as far as the board and administrations are concerned.
>
> In an effort to shed some light on this matter, the superintendents of districts currently under sanctions were contacted. They seemed to be in unanimous agreement that sanctions have no discernable effect on the operation of their respective school districts.....
> Perhaps the time has come for professional educators to concentrate on the cure and to eliminate the non-productive practice of invoking professional sanctions on school districts in Ohio.[3]

Mr. Martin does some fancy stepping in his interpretation of his 'evidence.' First, he desires to know if the teachers are happy with the sanctions, but then he abruptly leaves that question and asks another. Do administrators in sanctioned districts think that the sanctions are worthwhile? He asks this second question without ever answering the first concerning teachers. His answer to the second question is also of dubious value. The superintendents of sanctioned districts "seemed to be in unanimous agreement." How can a group of superintendents seem to be unanimous? Either they are or they are not. Mr. Martin's statistics seem to be non-existence; what he actually gives us are his own opinions. Whether he actually talked to the superintendents is in doubt.

Teachers must bargain from equal strength and without a collective bargaining agreement teachers often must use sanctions and even strikes in order to balance the power struggle. Such a power struggle became inevitable after 1968 when the Ohio collective bargaining bill failed.

> In 1968 when the Ohio Senate killed Senate Bill 30, the school employee negotiations bill, Senators Oliver Ocasek and Walter Powell were quoted as predicting that teacher strikes would occur without bargaining procedures. Seven years and 138 school strikes later, Ohio is still without a bargaining law.[4]

So, in a way, Mr. Martin is right about the state of Ohio not granting equity to Ohio teachers. But on another level, the local community, he is quite incorrect. Sanctions and strikes have proved to be effective methods in dealing with the arrogance of school boards.

The Youngstown schools were having difficulty in gaining board recognition in 1973. On September 6th, the Ohio Education Association placed sanctions upon the school district which asked teachers to avoid employment there. Within a few months the Professional Rights and Responsibilities Commission of OEA was able to report that conditions had improved considerably, enough to remove the sanctions.[5] Antwerp Schools were also sanctioned on April 20, 1974. By the following year conditions had improved to the point where the sanctions could be removed.[6] In both cases teachers stayed in the classrooms, yet showed their extreme displeasure with their boards of education. Short of a strike, the sanction does place the teachers in a position of some power, because the public image of the school district is disparaged throughout Ohio. Problems that could be solved through collective bargaining and binding arbitration become communication breakdowns when boards refuse to talk in good faith.

As examples of communication breakdowns, the sanctions imposed upon the Greenville, Mariemont, and Mount Healthy school districts should be looked at carefully. First, the Greenville school district had suffered a strike in January, 1975. This strike brought about a great deal of bitterness in the community. The school board immediately retaliated against the teachers with a list of rules for future employee behavior. Instedd of a professional bargaining situation, the board resorted to the following vindictive regulations:

1. contract termination for sleeping while on duty.
2. contract termination for gambling on school property.
3. contract termination for loafing or engaging in horseplay.
4. contract termination for habitual tardiness.
5. contract termination for using abusive language.

Another regulation forbade teachers from taking home any school owned property, which could prevent them from doing their homework since school texts and teaching manuals are board property.[7] Such harassment from boards of education demean the entire system. Without bargaining agreements such petty tactics can escalate on both sides with the ill-will so generated poisoning the schools for years.

In the Mariemont dispute, 93 out of the 104 teachers in the system belong to the local association. Yet, the school board refuses to negotiate with the teachers. Such high-handed tactics were condemned by one association member who said that "collective bargaining would provide an avenue of communication that would allow the expertise of teachers to influence educational decisions and help provide the best quality education possible." The Mariemont system was put under sanctions on March 22, 1975 and remains so today.[8]

On November 10, 1975 the Mt. Healthy school district was put on sanctions by the OEA. Again, the board of education refused to bargain in good faith with the teachers. An advisory panel had investigated the impasse and had recommended meaningful bargaining. Teachers were being harassed by school administrators and the board of education refused to allow the teachers to pick a representative of their choice while the board did employ outside legal help. To the Mt. Healthy board equality is a one-way street.[9] The sanctions remain in the school district.

Each of the above disputes, in the area of lack of communication, typify the problems faced by many teachers and teacher groups today. In order to influence the schools teachers find themselves faced with the basic problem of power politics practiced by overbearing, entrenched boards of education who look upon the teachers as mere servants or employees and not as professionals. Teachers want to have a

part to play in curriculum reform, but all to often they are only allowed to serve on committees and make suggestions, suggestions that can be ignored by administrators and boards. The new militancy by teacher groups does not stop with salary requests. Teachers are finally deciding to get involved in policy decisions too. Curriculum reform very definitely falls into a genuine teacher area for concern and many contracts are beginning to spell out curriculum changes for school districts throughout Ohio. The OEA sets forth this philosophy:

> The teachers of Ohio and of the nation are determined that instructional and societal improvements and other matters of broad scope are proper subjects for consideration at the bargaining table. OEA-IPD is to be commended for developing high quality materials that reflect teachers' concerns for quality education and affirmative action and that are directly useful to local associations in the bargaining process. Those materials have been refined through the use of well-designed needs assessment surveys.[10]

Teachers and teachers' groups are well-prepared to go about curriculum reform in a very professional way when and if school boards allow them to do so. As we have seen, however, many teachers get trapped by delaying and insulting tactics used by school boards which attempt to rule school districts with old-fashioned, arrogant methods. Instead of mutual cooperation and communication, school boards and teacher associations often find themselves locked in battles for power. Well-designed instructional units have been developed by the OEA for use by teachers and administrators. The OEA is also ready to back up teacher complaints against school boards with sanctions and legal help. But many teachers do not join, or do not believe that the OEA can do anything about their individual situation. Until teachers unite and begin to trust each other curriculum reform will come slowly.

One older teacher found out that the OEA can be a potent tool in dealing with school boards which violoate contractual obligations. Mrs. Ida Scott retired from the Sylvania City Schools recently and thought she would be receiving a large severance paycheck because of a recently negotiated agreement with the Sylvania school board. She waited and waited. Finally, she called to see what was holding up her check. The school board said that she was not entitled to it because she did not put the word "retire" into her letter of resignation. The OEA came to her rescue and was in the process of taking the board to court when the board finally gave in and wrote Mrs. Scott her check for $1,800. Mrs. Scott had taken her membership with the OEA for granted in the past, but now she sees the benefits of teacher unity. After the 10 month struggle, she described her local SEA as "an organization that gets things done."[11]

"An organization that gets things done" is very necessary before curriculum reform can begin in earnest. Many teachers go back to universities in order to learn about modern curriculum methods but never get to use their ideas because of the paternalistic organizations found administering their school districts. The OEA has a comprehensive program for curriculum reform that can be used by any affiliate. The OEA also has the backbone to back up any local that wishes to take a more professional stance toward reform.

In its convention report for 1975 the OEA provides a firm philosophy for effective action:

> The selection of educational materials was the topic for another resolution which said that ' educators must select instructional materials without censorship. Challenge of the choice of instructional materials must be orderly and objective, under procedures mutually adopted by professional associations and school boards.
>
> The resolution urged local affiliates to seek the removal of regulations which restrict the selection of a diversity of instructional materials or which limit educators in the selection of such materials.
>
> Speaking to the topic of academic freedom, delegates adopted the position that ' controversial issues should be a part of instructional programs when judgment of the professional staff deems the issues appropriate to the curriculum and to the maturity of the student.[12]

The OEA philosophy includes both teachers and board members as integral parts in the planning and selection of curriculum. It also provides for an orderly approach to possible complaints about curriculum and tries to insure that attacks on curriculum are not immediately successful, resulting in undue pressure on teachers who have carefully adopted such reforms. All too often boards of education cave-in to the least bit of pressure from the community. Under the OEA philosophy curriculum changes are well thought out by faculty and board, with changes coming about only after due process. It might seem that this would always be the case, but without a master contract spelling out all the nuances of curriculum reform, any reform might quickly be eliminated by reactionary members of the community.

As a further device for effective curriculum reform, the OEA suggests the use of well-planned training sessions for all teachers at a particular school or system. The OEA provides materials and manpower for these training sessions and further suggests that teachers be the instigators of such meetings. Furthermore, the OEA gives some concrete advice to in-service training planners:

1. Don't attempt the program at the end of the school day.
2. Don't invite someone from the central office who may lack credentials and respect and experience to conduct your program.
3. Don't organize a one-hour lecture program.
4. Don't plan a program without first assessing the needs of your teachers.
5. Don't plan a non-involvement program.
6. Don't overlook the audio-visual programs of the OEA.

Besides these practical 'don'ts', the OEA also advises long-range planning. Two or three year programs should be emphasized in line with current curriculum efforts already in progress.[13] If such in-service training is organized by teachers for the good of the system, respect and effectiveness of the teaching staff will accrue.

Along with the planning advice, the OEA sets up in-service programs of its own with great success. Literally hundreds of Ohio OEA members attend curriculum conferences throughout the state each year. In February, 1975 at least 150 OEA members attended a conference in Columbus sponsored by the OEA Commission on the Improvement of Education in Ohio. This conference centered its attention on ways to break down the prejudices concerning sex roles and biases which limit the types of opportunities available to students throughout the state. The Conference attempted to do the following:

1. make others more aware of sex bias.
2. teach women to be more supportive of other women.
3. change the stereotype of women in education and motivating women to aspire to higher positions.
4. influencing others to take humanists seriously so they can make their views known without putting others on the defensive.
5. confronting the fact that you can't change life for women without changing life for men.
6. providing role models for women.[14]

Such affective training sessions for men and women teachers help the cooperative atmosphere of school systems which might still be dealing with school situations involving unequal pay for men and women in extra-curricular activites. It also serves as a basis to include relevant course material in social studies and health education classes, as well as improve the general morale of a school system through the sharing of ideas and trust.

Another type of OEA conference deals with specific teaching goals, such as the teaching of the metric system. More than 200 OEA members attended a conference workshop concerning the teaching approach to metrics in January, 1975. "Participants at the seminar had an opportunity at small clinic sessions to learn a variety of techniques, games, and projects that can be used to teach metric concepts to students," reported the January 31, 1975 issue of Ohio Schools.[15]

A third type of curriculum conference occured in November, 1975 when a guest speaker, Harry K. Wong, talked about discipline in the classroom and how children respond to love and attention. Wong stated that "discipline problems decline and learning increases as the distance between the student and the teacher decreases." He also explained that " it is also as important to smile as it is to give praise and show concern."[16] Such advice serves as a motivation factor for many teachers and the thrust of such OEA programs is to improve classroom instruction. At this same conference, another speaker, L.P. Hochen, explained the various uses of micro-teaching to improve teacher effectiveness. By pinpointing a teacher's specific problem, the micro-teaching experience can apparently bring about a change in teacher behavior. And naturally the children benefit again.[17]

Thus, the OEA is not only an effective bargaining agent for school districts. It is also a leader in curriculum reform through its series of on-going workshops throughout the state. The OEA-Instructional Services Division also makes available to its members many pamphlets concerning curriculum reform; among these are: "Individualization Can Work," "Differentiated Staffing," "Schools without Failure," "Teacher Evaluation," "Curriculum Committees," "Continuous Education," "Motivation-Creating the Desire to Learn," and other practical suggestive materials for teachers.

The OEA is very eager to help Ohio's teachers. It fully realizes that many school districts have uphill battles facing them in dealing with recalcitrant school boards. It knows that many educators attending its workshops may never get a chance to use the innovative methods being suggested. The OEA itself is fighting a battle to pass a collective bargaining act here in Ohio so that school boards and teacher organizations can negotiate on equal terms. Until that day comes, the OEA and teachers throughout the state will have to live with an Ohio Supreme Court ruling in 1975 which was deemed a major victory for equity. This ruling helped teachers in the following ways:

1. It stated that school boards may legally enter into master contracts with teachers.
2. It stated that such contracts are enforceable.
3. It stated that binding arbitration is legal as a final step of negotiations.
4. It stated that teacher contracts may be wide in scope and cover a variety of professional concerns.[18]

Thus, teachers were given the legal right to negotiate, if they succeed in getting approval by the board of education. The fight for the immediate right to such bargaining is still not won, and many more strikes and sanctions may be necessary before teachers are treated as equals. In the meantime, each school district and teacher will have to be as dedicated and as strong as possible if needed curriculum innovation is to occur. The battle for equality has been joined and the results can only be won by concerted effort. But the curriculum reform is worth it.

Notes

1. Thomas, Warren F. "Striking for Fun and Profit," OSBA Journal, (October, 1975), p. 9
2. "Royer Sees a Pattern in Treatment of Teachers," Ohio Schools, (November 28, 1975), pp. 8-9.
3. Martin, David B. "Sanctions: Much Ado about Nothing," Ohio School Boards Journal, (July, 1975), p. 5.
4. "Ohio House Fails to Override Veto of Bargaining Bill," Ohio Schools, (November 28, 1975), p. 7.
5. "The Executive Committee," Ohio Schools, (March 14, 1975), p. 10.
6. Ibid., p. 10.
7. "Dateline," Ohio Schools, (April 11, 1975), p. 3.
8. "Teachers in Action," Ohio Schools,(April 11, 1975), p. 10.
9. "Dateline," Ohio Schools, (November 28, 1975), p. 5.
10. "A Special Report on OEA Programs and Services," Ohio Schools, (May 16, 1975), p. 16.
11. "Teachers in Action," Ohio Schools, (April 25, 1975), p. 9.
12. "Convention Report: Setting Policy for OEA," Ohio Schools, (April 11, 1975), p. 7-8.
13. Helms, Ronald G., "The Association Role in Developing In-Service Training," Ohio Schools, (March 28, 1975), p. 18.
14. "Breaking Down the Prejudices about Sex Roles," Ohio Schools, (March 14, 1975), p. 16.
15. "Getting Prepared for the Challenge to Metrics," Ohio Schools, (January 31, 1975), p. 20.
16. "Reaching Your Students with 'Success, Praise and Love," Ohio Schools, (November 28, 1975), p. 19.
17. Ibid.
18. "A Major Victory for the Teacher-Board Bargaining Process," Ohio Schools, (March 14, 1975), p. 6.

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"Ohio House Fails to Override Veto of Bargaining Bill," Ohio Schools, (November 28, 1975), p. 7.

"The Public Looks at Their School Boards," Ohio Schools, (May 16, 1975), p. 30.

"Reaching Your Students with 'Success, Praise and Love,'" Ohio Schools, (November 28, 1975), p. 18.

"Royer Sees a Pattern in Treatment of Teachers," Ohio Schools, (November 28, 1975), p. 8.

"Selecting Textbooks and Library Materials," Ohio Schools, (September 26, 1975), p. 24.

"A Special Report on OEA Programs and Services," Ohio Schools, (May 16, 1975), p. 14.

"Teachers in Action," Ohio Schools, (April 11, 1975), p. 10.

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"Teachers, Parents Combine Talents to Build a Learning Center," Ohio Schools, (March 28, 1975), p. 12.

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